

**Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**  
**Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement**  
**Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.**

**In opposition to raised *Senate Bill 378 An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force***

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and honorable members of the Education Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in opposition to raised Senate Bill 378, *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 64,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 17 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services and education, to make positive sexual and reproductive health decisions.

We were part of a statewide coalition that advocated for a full credit of comprehensive health education in 2010. The half credit was not enough at the time and we strongly oppose taking it away now. A component of that half credit requirement is sexual health education which is an essential component of students' physical, social and emotional development. This proposed removal of the half credit of health education will move us in the wrong direction when what we know from the 2011 Connecticut Youth Risk Behavior Survey indicates that among high school students; nearly half of those surveyed have had sexual intercourse.<sup>i</sup> Young people need this information and have the right to comprehensive sexual health education. We support the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) guidelines that state sexuality education is a lifelong process of acquiring information and forming attitudes, beliefs and values about such important topics as identity, relationships and intimacy.<sup>ii</sup> Sexual health education provides young people with the knowledge and skills they need and deserve to promote their health and well-being throughout their lifetime.

The CT State Department of Education has developed Guidelines for the Sexual Health Education Component of Comprehensive Health Education as a resource guide to support the Healthy & Balanced Living Curriculum Framework. As stated on their website, "sexual health education is one vital component of a planned, ongoing and systematic health education program. These planned health programs provide an opportunity for students to receive information that promotes their health and well-being."<sup>iii</sup>

At Planned Parenthood our education and training team provides comprehensive sexual health education to nearly 7,000 teens and nearly 1,000 parents/guardians each year. We are committed to breaking down barriers that restrict access to health care and education services by ensuring all people receive the care and information they need to stay healthy, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and income. Planned Parenthood uses evidence informed and evidence based interventions to educate youth and young adults on healthy sexuality, pregnancy and disease prevention. We are committed to changing the negative social norm surrounding sexuality because we believe everyone deserves to have healthy sexual lives and experiences which include consensual sexual relationships. Sexual pleasure can be important to our emotional and physical health and well-being.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England is working with 82 teen peer educators in five communities across the state to provide young people with the skills and resources to be leaders in their community and provide critical information to their peers. The unfortunate reality is that not all young people are guaranteed the right to sexual health education, many schools do not teach it and our peer educators know firsthand how important that information is to their communities in developing healthy relationships and positive sexual experiences.

We urge you to oppose the removal of the half-credit health education requirement from the high school graduation requirements in Senate Bill 378, *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force*. Connecticut schools need to strengthen health education taught to students, not eliminate it. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

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<sup>i</sup>Youth Risk Behavior and School Health Policy Fact Sheets [http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/yrbs/pdf/hiv/ct\\_hiv\\_combo.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/yrbs/pdf/hiv/ct_hiv_combo.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education: Kindergarten–12th Grade, Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, 2004, p.11 <http://www.siecus.org/>

<sup>iii</sup>Guidelines for the Sexual Health Education Component of Comprehensive Health Education, CT State Department of Education [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/curriculum\\_root\\_web\\_folder/gshecche.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/curriculum_root_web_folder/gshecche.pdf)